



CONFERENCE OF INGOs  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONFERENCE DES OING DU  
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## WINTER SESSION CONFERENCE OF INGOS CONF/PLE(2013)SYN1

Strasbourg, 15 March 2013

### DRAFT SYNOPSIS OF THE MEETING OF 24 JANUARY 2013

#### 1. Opening of the meeting by Jean-Marie Heydt, President

The members of the Conference of INGOS, meeting on 24 January, had:

2. **adopted** the agenda [[CONF/PLE\(2013\)OJ1](#)] with one change : item 9 "Adoption of the new Rules of Procedure of the Conference of INGOs" would be dealt with immediately after item 5, as Rémy Berthier, who was responsible for presenting the changes to the rules, could not be present in the afternoon.

3. **adopted** the synopsis of the meeting held on 27 June 2012 [[CONF/PLE\(2012\)SYN3](#)].

#### 4. 2012 activity report of the Conference INGOS

**listened** to the President take stock of what had happened in 2012: after experiencing some difficulties, the Conference of INGOs was now well known through the activities of some of its members and was often approached , which was a positive development. It had, for example, been invited to take part in the activities of the North/South Centre along with government representatives. In the current situation, which was not just a crisis but a genuine metamorphosis of our society, governments needed an organised civil society, whose strength lay in its beliefs and its values. As the INGOs' budget was steadily decreasing, many of them were bound to disappear, and that would seriously weaken democracy.

**asked** the Bureau and the Standing Committee to circulate all information to make up for the fact that there were now only two sessions per year and that as a result the other members of the Conference lacked information. The President approved the request and promised to take the necessary steps.

**listened** to Maritchu Rall, Rapporteur, present the main aspects of the 2012 activity report of the Conference of INGOs [[CONF\(2012\)RAPACT](#)]: the priorities, the activities implemented by its committees, and the work of INGO-Services, which gave the Conference the financial means to be represented at key events.

She underlined the major events of the year:

- The Quadrilogue (growing focus on democracy)
- The activities of the Conference:
  - Presentation of the Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process in numerous countries, which had been translated into 20 languages;
  - Active participation of the Conference in the Council of Europe's intergovernmental committees;
  - Participation in two events at the 1<sup>st</sup> World Democracy Forum;

- Continuation of the work of the Expert Council on NGO Law in different countries;
    - Joint organisation of the Conference to be held on 17 October, “Building Europe through Human Rights: Acting together against Extreme Poverty” ([link to the programme](#)) with the Secretariat of the Social Charter. This Conference had provided the opportunity to hear, at the Council of Europe, the accounts of persons directly concerned. A joint declaration “Acting together to eradicate extreme poverty in Europe” had been signed by the 4 pillars of the Council of Europe ([link to the declaration](#));
    - Establishment of a contact strategy in countries around the Mediterranean ;
  - Continuation and finalisation of the revision of the rules of procedure and establishment of a working group to review Resolution (2003)8 on participatory status.
- Outlook for 2013:
- even greater participation in the next World Democracy Forum;
  - a conference on education to follow on from the conference held in Tlemcen in 2003;
  - the creation of a toolbox for the implementation of the European Convention for Human Rights at national level.

Following this presentation, a number of changes were requested:

- Page 14, § d. 2<sup>nd</sup> sub-paragraph: replace CESP by CSEP;
- Cyril Ritchie thought that, in order to make the text more understandable, it was necessary to make the following clarification in the introduction:
  1. Introduction
 

The Conference of INGOs’ capacity to mobilise stakeholders in Europe and to respond to the many different situations depended first and foremost on the willingness and commitment of member NGOs and also on the Bureau and the Standing Committee, which were the driving forces;
- Christophe Spreng asked that on page 4 § b) the sentence referring to Hammamet be removed and replaced by the paragraph he had prepared and which reiterated the words used on the June information sheet. It was the basis of the dialogue toolkit.

Other comments gave rise to a discussion:

- Regret to see that François Becker’s work on “Human Rights and Religions” had not been mentioned in the report: the President pointed out that this work should be completed in time for the June session;
- The work which the members of the Conference of INGOs were doing on the steering committees. The Standing Committee should devote more time to co-ordination with the associations that had participatory status and which attended some of these committee meetings;
- Reference should be made to the new network for women, which was very active, particularly with North African women’s associations. Violence against women was a priority subject in all sectors of the Council of Europe;
- The work on “Sects in education” should also be added to the report presented by the Chair of the Education and Culture Committee;
- The request that, in future, when the Conference held its meetings the activity report should already be translated into English .

**Unanimously adopted** the activity report, including the requested additions.

## 5. Expert Council on NGO Law ([link to the site](#))

**listened** to Cyril Ritchie, President of the Expert Council, inform the Conference that 2012 had been an intermediary year. The new terms of reference of the Expert Council had been adopted in June. Examining laws and verifying that they were actually applied was an important task. The Council could influence legislation before it was adopted. Recommendation (2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers on the Legal Status of NGOs, which had been unanimously adopted needed to be implemented. The number of INGO activities was dropping not only in Belarus and Azerbaijan but also in other states. Special attention needed to be paid to the situation in Russia where the associations which received international funding had to appear on a special register. Cyril Ritchie said that the Expert Council was working with the Venice Commission on draft guidelines concerning freedom of association. It was also working together with the Commissioner for Human Rights.

## 9. Adoption of the new rules of procedure of the Conference of INGOs ([link to the rules of procedure](#))

**listened to** Rémy Berthier, President of the Verification and Dispute Committee, present the amendments to the Rules of Procedure. The main changes concerned:

- systematic two-round elections of the chairs and vice-chairs of the committees at the plenary session;
- all elected members of the Bureau or Standing Committee had the right to vote;
- the procedure for drafting recommendations and resolutions had been clarified. The resolutions and recommendations were prepared by the Committee, discussed and adopted by the Committee and finally presented at the plenary for final adoption by the Conference of INGOs. In urgent cases, the Standing Committee could discuss and adopt a resolution or a recommendation;
- the place of the media was more clearly stated;
- co-ordination between the working groups and the different committees had been made clearer .

Several questions were raised after the presentation:

- Who had imposed the 50% reduction in the budget, which had led to operating difficulties? The reply was that the Rules of Procedure did not comprise the budget.
- Who decided what amounted to an emergency? The decision could be taken by the Chair of the Committee concerned and the President of the Conference.

**Adopted** the amended Rules of Procedure with 5 abstentions. It came into force immediately.

## 6. **listened to** the statement by Claudia Luciani, Director of Democratic Governance, who said that she was interested to see what the Conference did to foster democracy. She wished to propose a number of ideas. In view of the challenges facing the Council of Europe, she proposed two priorities:

- working on the crisis of confidence in democratic institutions;
- preparing concrete recommendations on “living together”, including the economic and social aspects.

She proposed several activities:

- consider drafting a Charter on Democracy;
- prepare an action plan on diversity as an asset, which would urge states to comply with a number of norms and to study their shortcomings;
- prepare civic participation indicators in respect of associations, trade unions and elections;
- open the World Democracy Forum to the question of participation in the information technology era.

She thought that not enough account was taken of civil society’s participation and that more should be done to highlight the role of the INGOs and to extend their geographic impact.

## 7. The Conference of INGOs and the promotion of democracy

### Declaration on genuine democracy

Listened to Giuseppe Guarneri present the declaration. European democracy was considered to be a model but it had its failings: the fact that it was weakening, corruption, the political marginalisation of the poorest members of society and their under-representation in national parliaments. It was essential to consider the evolution of democracy.

The aim of the declaration was to underline, by means of the treaties, conventions and other texts adopted by the Council of Europe, the main elements of genuine democracy, with a list of requirements and values.

He suggested that the words “out of respect for future generations” should be added to Section C.I. It was also proposed that an amendment on the quality of the living environment be made to Section C.II. A discussion ensued on whether these proposals, which would change the text adopted the previous day by the Committee on Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges, were justified.

The President of the Conference put the amendments to the vote.

The first was adopted with two abstentions.

As the outcome of the vote on the second amendment was 42 against and 38 for, the amendment was rejected.

**Adopted** the declaration with these changes ([link to the declaration](#))

The World Democracy Forum 5 – 11 October 2012 ([link to the Forum website](#))

**watched** a film by Michal Mlcousek on the civil society debate held on 7 October ([link to the film](#)).

**listened to** the report on the Forum presented by Sophie Dimitroulias. She drew attention to the fact that the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe had been present during the entire Forum and had made a statement. The Forum had been an exercise in truth. The participants and the speakers had had the opportunity to find out about all the networks and to understand the importance of such representation.

A round table on “living together” had been held on the Wednesday. Veysel Filiz said that discrimination was a major obstacle to living together. The social contract of our institutions needed to be completely overhauled. The Council of Europe had three tools with which it could do so:

- The Expert Council on NGO Law ;
- The report of the Group of Eminent Persons: ‘Living Together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe’ ([link to the report](#))
- The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue ([link to the White Paper](#))

**Decided** to increase participation at the next Forum in autumn 2013

### World Democracy Forum 27 - 29 November 2013: Rewiring democracy: towards citizens' democracy for the information age

Listened to Irena Guidikova present the new format of the Forum, which should be very participative and reply to the question: What can be done to restore public confidence in democratic institutions? The speaker asked the Conference to help and hoped that the INGOs would be present.

#### **Reactions:**

Sabine Rohmann, Chair of the Education Committee, said that the working group on education in new information technologies was at the Forum’s disposal. Parents needed to be educated in the new technologies which were their children’s world. In reply to this proposal Irena Guidikova said that one INGO ought to take charge of this issue for the Forum. The working party on the media was awaiting a precise mandate, to which it would respond in accordance with its resources.

## 8. The Conference of INGOs and the eradication of extreme poverty

**Unanimously adopted** the draft resolution [[CONF/PLE\(2013\)RES1](#)], previously adopted first by the Human Rights Committee and subsequently by the Standing Committee.

**listened to** Marie José Schmitt, who said that the 17 October had been a wonderful day from two points of view; firstly because it had given rise to a joint declaration by the Quadrilogue and also because a large delegation of very poor people from 9 different countries had made the day even more interesting through their first-hand accounts. The songs sung by the Council of Europe choir and the reading of the resolution in various languages around the commemorative stone had been further highlights. The Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Working Group had been given responsibility for follow-up to the 17 October. It was important that these persons be invited to the next World Democracy Forum.

**listened to** Antonina Dashkina, who, on behalf of the Russian delegation, gave her impression of the day. The Russian delegation had comprised a dozen members, some of whom worked in welfare services while others lived in poverty. Their travel and subsistence expenses had been covered by governors of Russian regions who acknowledged that there were problems of poverty.

## 10. Evaluation of the four-yearly reports of INGOs with participatory status

**listened to** Jane Crozier inform them that some one hundred INGOs had not sent in their four-yearly report, which was a sine qua non condition if they wished to retain their participatory status in 2013. To date, 250 INGOs had replied. The report had a dual aim: to see who the Council of Europe was working with and to see what the NGOs were doing in member states. She suggested that the INGOs who had not replied come to see her at the end of the meeting.

The President invited the INGOs to find out from Jane Crozier whether they had sent in their report. They still had two months to do so.

## 11. The Conference of INGOs and the countries in the Southern Neighbourhood of the Council of Europe

### Guidelines for a consistent and concerted approach

- clarified the role of the Conference in the neighbouring countries;
- assistance should be provided to local NGOs in a spirit of support and encouragement;
- proposed the establishment of a watchdog.

Gérard Gréneron gave the example of Tunisian policemen who had set up two police trade unions in Tunisia at the time of the Revolution.

Anje Wiersinga thought that the document was excellent but that there was not enough time to discuss it. It would be alright to adopt the document as it stood but it would doubtlessly be necessary to revise it at a second session. She raised several questions: Where was the Code of Good Practice? Was women's role to be strengthened or simply given support? Should the watchdog body be separate from the Committee? How should the committees and the watchdog co-operate? Who would deal with this issue? This element ought to be put on the agenda of the June session. There had to be more consultation. They had to take part in a number of activities and progress together with local authorities on a number of subjects. As the situation was changing rapidly, why not adopt the practice of written questions?

**Decided** to approve the principle of the document in the knowledge that it would have to be revised ([link to the text](#))

## Gender equality

**Unanimously adopted** Recommendation [[CONF/PLE\(2013\)REC1](#)]: Gender equality – a condition for success of the Arab Spring, presented by Betty Doornenbal

**listened to** Sabine Rohmann present the Conference on Intercultural Education, Active Citizenship and Human Rights, to be held in autumn 2013. It would very probably take place in Oran. The objective pursued since 2002 was to establish a genuine North/South dialogue and partnership between NGOs from Europe and those from Africa. An information document should be ready by the end of February ([link to the project description](#)).

**listened to** the President of the Conference of INGOs present the project to make a visit to Tunis. This exploratory visit, which should have taken place in January, had been postponed. The aim was to meet representatives of civil society, the authorities and foreign institutions which were based in Tunis and operated as foundations. It was necessary to see what could be done in Tunis in practical terms.

### **12. Adoption of texts prepared by the Committees**

Unanimously adopted Recommendation [[CONF/PLE\(2013\)REC2](#)] “Changes in the situation with regard to torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the Council of Europe member states”.

The representative of the FIACAT explained why this recommendation had been proposed to the Human Rights Committee. There had been a constant increase torture in detention centres in Council of Europe member states and more needed to be done to prevent such practices.

The content of Daniel Zielinski’s text on the Conference on Poverty, which was to be held on 21 and 22 February 2013, had been approved. However, the text had not been presented to the plenary assembly [[CONF/DEM\(2013\)RES1](#)].

**13.** There were no open questions this time. Such questions should be submitted to the Conference prior to the plenary.

### **14. Other business**

The Conference had been invited to the 8<sup>th</sup> Forum on xenophobia in Ukraine. It would take place in Kiev in March.

Reminder: 2013 was European Citizens’ Year. NGOs should be concerned by citizenship and participate in this event.

**15. Next session:** Thursday 27 June.

Rapporteurs: Odile Moreau and Marie-José Schmitt